Trail Camera Savvy Can

My first trail camera sat in a closet nearly 10 years before it had its first batteries installed. This says as much about my general indifference toward technology as it does a lack of imagination, as I lived outside whitetail country at the time and couldn't think of anything interesting to spy on in my desert surroundings. I simply didn't understand what I was missing, as the possibilities, even in areas short on Eastern whitetail, are limitless. I might have used it to see desert muley bucks visiting water holes, when gobblers arrived at strutting grounds, or to learn how often bull elk used an obvious wallow. That changed when I moved to northern Idaho, which isn't only elk country, but whitetail habitat where baiting bears is also legal. The camera that remained in disuse so long was pressed into service well before the last of the household shipping boxes were unpacked.

I quickly added more trail cams to my arsenal, until on an average November day I now spend every spare moment out of a stand "running cameras." I now keep trail cameras deployed nearly eight months a year, keeping track of whitetail, turkey, black bear and elk movements. I'm up to a dozen cameras but always feel I need more. I've developed definite design affinities, and certainly have learned much about effective camera deployment. More pointedly, I've learned not all cameras are created equal – driven home initially by that original, outdated unit that was short on options and especially storage capacity.

Better Understanding

Selling trail cameras means competing with big box stores, on-line outlets and even eBay. This is nothing new, whether dealing with bows or broadheads. Of course what you have

Many customers have the mistaken idea today's trail cameras are difficult or confusing to set up and program. In the past this might have been true, but the best modern cameras have become much easier to manipulate, including more straight-forward user logic, icon symbols and push-button settings. Below we start a quick example of going from box to field in nine basic steps, using SpyPoint's new Pro-X Plus trail camera. (Note: Interior case can be removed from exterior shell for easier handling). Of course other options are included, but this is one quick way to begin taking still pictures. When you choose a line of cameras to stock and promote, think about having a display model you can demonstrate.

1. Install batteries, in this case six AA lithium cells, positioning the interior switch to alkaline (1.5 volts) or rechargeable (1.2 volts) batteries. Molded battery icons make polarity direction (+/-) easy to understand.

2. Install an SD card into the side slot labeled SD CARD. The Pro-X Plus accepts cards up to 32GB, though smaller cards are acceptable. (Viewing screen will flash DISK FULL when card reaches capacity).

3. Turn on. A simple ON/OFF switch is pushed into the up position. A SpyPoint logo comes up briefly on the viewing screen followed by a "Select your Mode" page. Use the four-point directional keys (Up/Down [top/bottom] and Left/Right) to choose between "Photo" (still), "Video," "Test" (front red light blinks on when you walk into camera view and are being detected with current distance settings, "Settings" (to program) or "View" (to view captured images).

By Patrick Meitin

Build Important Store Sales

to offer is customer service and knowledge. It's important when selling trail cameras to have a thorough understanding of what makes brands you sell tick, from basic programming to trouble-shooting customer units that are acting up. A simple example: A customer shows up complaining of photos with strange colors or coarse lines running through them. This is a simple matter of weak batteries and nothing to be concerned about. In another case a customer arrives to complain of receiving 1,200 shots of nothing at all, a quick look on a laptop computer reveals a weed stem or tree branch waving on breezes and triggering the camera sensor.

Educating customers also means helping them understand what they're getting for their money. Perhaps luckily for the independent retailer, most trail cam models sold by mega-marts and on-line are rock-bottom, price-point models lacking cutting-edge technology, programming options, storage capacity, or battery life found in more costly units. This is not to say price-point models aren't viable for some (I'll get to that in a bit), but hard-core whitetail hunters, in particular, are more likely to grow frustrated with such models. This is where I found myself a couple years ago: Spending more on batteries during an average month than the cameras I was using were worth, finding that by purchasing higher-quality models I actually saved money through less frequent battery changes.

On the subject of batteries, in areas where extreme cold's a concern, AA-powered cameras save the day. The simple fact is standard alkaline batteries freeze (rendering units inoperable) at around 10 to 15 degrees fahrenheit. Lithium batteries (which aren't commonly available in C and D cell sizes) aren't affected by cold, allowing cameras to operate in temperatures well below zero. Lithium cells also provide about five

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4. Click down to "Settings," followed by pushing the OK button in the middle of the directional keys. You may then click onto any of the programming options - Delay Time, Date and Time, for instance, in addition to Delay, Video length and so on. Set to desired settings, current time & date.

5. Choose a feature you wish to program by pushing the Up/Down keys shown at center right and click OK button in their center to make adjustments to options.

6. Shown here is an example of switching delay time (Delay) between shots. Highlight option desired by pushing Up/Down keys and then click OK button. Use up and down keys to highlight desired time (10 or 30 seconds, 1, 5, 15 or 30 minutes) and push OK. Click Up/Down (top/bottom) keys to select another option and continue as above. (Photo sequence continues on the next page.)

times the effective battery life in any climactic conditions, with some AA units operating from nine months to a full year on $17 worth of lithium batteries (the price of eight Energizer Ultimate Lithium). This is also largely a function of design, as I've used C and D cell units demonstrating impressive battery life in moderate temperatures. Rechargeable batteries in larger sizes are another option I must explore.

Another useful feature on high-end cameras is multiple triggering sequences. What this looks like is a camera firing a burst of, say, three to five photos, not only catching the doe initially triggering the camera, but also the buck dogging her closely (using this mode exhausts memory and batteries faster). No matter the unit quality, all excess grass, weeds and tree branches should be cleared from the viewing area, avoiding false triggering from vegetation moved by the smallest breezes. Advanced Passive Infrared Sensors (PIR), triggered by changes in temperature and not motion, also mitigate some of this effect.

Cheaper cameras also come with limited storage capacity, some inexpensive models I've used actually were unable to handle SD cards larger than 1.0GB. This isn't an issue if customers check cameras regularly, but if long work hours or remote deer leases keep customers out of the woods for long periods, more storage is obviously needed.

Speaking of photo storage, I've developed a system that works well for me. Each camera is paired with two SD cards, both the cards and the inside of the camera cover is coded with indelible ink ("WI1" equaling Wildgame Innovations #1, "UT" Stealth Cam UNIT, "MT" Moultrie, for instance). It's risky to randomly swap cards between camera brands, as most automatically format cards to required fields, rendering them incompatible with other cameras, usually causing excessive battery drain as cameras work to figure out the problem. While checking cameras I simply switch the unit off, pop out the card it holds, pop in an empty card, switch the camera back on and walk away – total time on site 10 seconds maximum.

More recently card readers have come into play. Units like Moultrie's Picture & Video Viewer, CuddeView's X2, Wildgame Innovations' CR1 SD Card Reader, Stealth Cam's Digital Picture Player & Card Reader, as examples, allow customers to view and edit on site, without the need for additional cards (SD cards larger then 4GB get pricey in a hurry). Then, of course, there are remote-access systems, allowing customers to manage trail cameras via home computer or mobile phone. See the March 2011 issue of *ArrowTrade*, article "Space Age Bowhunting Accessories" for more details.

Other features found in advanced cameras are zoom adjustability. This lets you choose wide-angle shots to capture wider areas, or zoom in when suitable anchors are too far away to target particular sites on wide-angle. On this subject, the detection zone of a particular camera, the range width in which a camera detects game, varies considerably. This normally isn't an advertised feature, trial and error are typically the only way to learn more. Essentially, it's best when the detection zone matches the field of view of the camera in question.

Many units also give customers up to three image-quality options, say, 3MP, 5MP and 8MP. Personally, I've never seen the need for high-quality trail-cam pictures, so long as I receive enough detail to see a buck's antlers clearly. More pointedly, especially in flash photos, higher resolution often results in blurred images

7. Click BACK button to return to starting menu and the camera portion of the unit is set and ready to go.

8. Adjust DISTANCE wheel on the side of the unit housing (left of SD CARD slot) from 5 to 50 feet to achieve desired PIR sensitivity.

9. Leave camera ON/OFF switch in the ON position (place interior case into exterior cover if you have chosen to remove it for easier handling), close case latches and walk away. The unit will automatically take pictures or video of anything passing through its sensor range. After images are acquired photos may be viewed and edited via the on-board viewing screen, or SD cards swapped for computer downloading, or placed in a SD card viewer for editing.

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on moving subjects. This is frustrating when an obviously big buck appears on camera but is too distorted to offer detail. Higher-quality images normally occupy more memory space, retard recovery time on follow-up shots and, I suspect, use more battery juice while recording. Five mega pixels (MP) seems a good happy medium, anything higher than 8MP, in my opinion is not necessary (I admit I've never owned one of the most expensive trail-camera models with 8MP-plus capabilities, so I could be wrong, I am basing my statements on cameras with adjustable 3MP through 8 MP images). Other cool features include moon phase and temperature (some Moultrie units even have barometric pressure along with the standard time/date stamp, allowing customers to better track long-term movement patterns.

Finally, one of the greatest developments in night-time illumination is infrared (IR) LEDs, lighting up subjects at distances even powerful strobe flashes are challenged by, without alerting the shyest bucks. LED in any form sucks less battery juice, especially important in cold weather or when checking cameras less frequently. Perhaps more useful, IR flashes won't alert potential thieves walking past a camera during low-light hours. Flash range, whether LED or strobe flash, varies considerably, sometimes being price dependent. Obviously, the more range a flash offers the more animals customers pick up during nighttime hours.

Bushnell's Trophy Cam is a high-end unit running on AA batteries and one of the first of the mini trail cams.

Best Of The Best

Every trail-cam company offers a flagship model, a unit showing off what a company's engineers are capable of. Whether the average bowhunter needs this level of technology or depth of options is beside the point, as many believe they do, believe that buying the best gives them an edge. There will always be those who equate buying power with hunting savvy and some of the very best (though not all) come with price tags upwards of $450. Of course, the very best trail cameras certainly offer more for those who demand performance, via faster trigger speeds, farther-reaching illumination, increased storage capabilities, more programming options and so forth. What you also seem to get with the top models is a higher degree of dependability, higher-quality internal components which mean a longer camera life and less difficulty in use. Understand, too, a single company's "best" doesn't necessarily mean it's as good as another company's top dog, as quality and price tags vary widely between brands.

Bushnell Outdoor Products
(913-752-3400; www.bushnell.com)

Bushnell's super-compact Trophy Cams have come to represent feature packed, user-friendly and highly dependable options at nearly half the price of the highest-priced units (from around $200 to $300 MSRP). They were one of the first promising one-year battery life from a single set of eight lithium AA batteries (I get about nine months from a set in extreme cold conditions, while also receiving from 100 to 150 shots daily). This long battery life is one of the top selling points of these units. This feature also allows it to operate flawlessly in temperatures from minus 5 to 140 degrees F (I've received photos in colder temperatures). Other AA units have appeared, but Bushnell's design still remains one of the most efficient. Its hand-sized compactness is another obvious selling point.

Bushnell added several upgrades for 2011, including Field Scan mode, which allows cameras to record photos at regular intervals without physical triggering ("plot-watch" mode). New Trophy Cams are also available with enhanced resolution (1080p HD) and audio-record features, while video recording can also be set on wide-screen resolution. Each new camera uses up to 32GB memory cards (boosting potential storage capacity to more than 25,000 photos). Other new options include Low-Glow Black LEDs invisible to game. In addition, models with viewers include larger 2x2-inch screens and zoom features for enhanced in-field review detail.

They're offered in five different models, including Black LED/HD Video/Color Viewer; Black LED/HD Video/B&W Text LCD; Color Viewer LCD/Brown Case; Bone Collector with B&W Text LCD/Realtree APG Camo Case; and the same with a Brown Case. Key features on all include 1-second trigger speed, moon-phase and temperature print on time/date line, a choice of how many batteries to run in the AA power supply, adjustable (low/med/high)

The Special Ops by Covert is a top-end camera with remote-access capabilities.

PIR sensor, 40 Black LED "flash" with 45 foot range, color-image LCD, 60-second video capabilities, 8MP resolution (adjustable for 3MP, 5MP or 8MP), one year battery life and easy set-up.

My Bone Collector Trophy Cam has been used hard for two seasons now without a single problem.

Covert Scouting Cameras
(877-462-1799; www.dlccovert.com)

With the introduction of nine all-new trail cameras for 2011 Covert is another company offering top-notch technology at a reasonable price. The Edge 8.1TL is an 8MP digital camera with infrared nighttime illumination and excellent security features. With an MSRP around $230, it also represents a great deal for the features offered. Prime features include Time Lapse Covert Game-Trakker software for "plot-watch" capabilities, Pipe Through Security allowing threading python security cables through housings deterring theft, drop-down access panel for easy programming and menu access while units are attached to the tree, EZAim Leveling System adjusting to accommodate crooked or tapered trees, password protection and moon-phase and temperature provided with time/date imprint.

Image quality can be adjusted for 3MP, 5MP or 8MP resolution and the unit offers six months of uninterrupted use on four AA lithium batteries. The camera is compatible with up to 32GB SD cards, allowing customers to combine Edge 8.1TL with Edge Battery E System to operate cameras for 12-plus months before running out of power or filling memory. Thirty IR LEDs provide a 60-foot flash range, combined with 1.2-second trigger speed and three-shot burst option, 640x480 video resolution and adjustable PIR sensitivity. The 2.5x3.7x5.9 unit is covered in Mossy Oak Infinity camouflage and includes a one year warranty.

The Edge 8TL is one of Covert's best cameras. It is compact, highly reliable and powered by AA batteries.

Cuddeback/ Non Typical
(920-347-3810; www.cuddeback.com)

One of the first to enter the trail-cam market, Mark Cuddeback's scouting cameras are considered by many as the best in the field. With one of the fastest trigger speeds in the industry, propriety Centered Subject Technology and a specially-designed internal camera maximizing depth-of-field, Cuddeback cameras have become the choice of many whitetail experts across the land. The 2011 Attack and Attack IR boast phenomenal .25-second trigger speed, allowing 10,000 to 50,000 images, respectively, on a single set of four D-cell batteries, 60-foot flash range (1.5-inch Zenon Strobe on Attack, 36 HiPwr LEDs on IR model) and 5MP resolution. Better yet, at about $250 this is also one of Cuddeback's most affordable cameras to date.

Set up is exceptionally simple, and both include Centered Subject Technology, SmartColor Image Technology, video mode providing up to 30-seconds of footage (day only Attack, day/night IR), Guard Duty Time Lapse mode, Genius Mounting, and 60MB internal memory or up to 32GB removable. SmartColor provides exceptional image quality, even in IR models. The Genius Mount

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www.VaneTec.com

System is a strap-mounted or screw-mounted tree bracket that a camera slides onto. Also available are optional tilt-adjustable and T-post mount brackets.

The Attack series will also interface with Cuddeback's Trophy Room software, taking precise moon phase, moon/sun rise/set times, moon/sun position and deer movement prediction schedules at the moment the image is taken. This provides reports analyzing customer's images to reveal influences on deer movement.

Leupold
(800-LEUPOLD; www.leupold.com)

New in the trail camera arena, Leupold burst onto the scene with the remarkable 10MP RCX-2. Taking their lead from intuitive smart phones and "plug-and-play" technology, the RCX Trail Camera System, with exclusive USB Controller/Viewer couldn't be easier to use. In its factory-shipped mode, customers can take it from the box to the field (after installing eight AA batteries and SD card) without programming fuss. The RCX-2 ($280) includes Dual Sensor Technology (DST). Customers can choose between a wide cone of sensing coverage to 45 feet, ideal for larger areas such as fields, or a narrower cone reaching 90 feet for use on a specific spot such as a feeder.

Trigger speeds are listed at "less than one second." Customers may also program each camera's setting to their own specifications and download and view high-resolution color, infrared and video images in the field with the USB plug-in Controller /Viewer. Captured images can then be downloaded from the controller to home computers. The RCX-2 kit ($330) includes camera, USB Controller/Viewer, 12-volt cable, Lock-Down Security Plate and screws, car adapter, USB cable, AA battery pack cartridge tray, lithium-ion battery for the Controller/Viewer, six hex standoffs and strap for mounting.

Nighttime illumination is supplied by 48 LEDs; when set at 10 degrees only 36 of the LEDs are engaged, at 45 degrees all 48 are used in the DST setting. Video mode includes audio, and the units include a 28MB internal memory, while also accepting up to 32GB SD cards. The RCS systems are compatible with an optional 12-volt external battery, the eight AA lithium batteries will power the unit for up to 10,000 images. The 13.7-ounce unit measures 2.5x5x7 inches.

One trick to getting quality trail cam photos is in how the camera is positioned. Set it up free of trash that can blur images and cause false triggerings , and at the best angle to catch passing action.

Moultrie
(800-653-3334;
www.moultriefeeders.com)

Moultrie, manufacturer of wildlife feeders, has more recently come to be known for rock-solid, highly-dependable trail cameras with cutting-edge technology. This is another brand I have hands-on experience with, my I-45 surviving three seasons without incident or glitches despite some hard knocks and extreme weather. The I65S is

Cuddeback is considered by many to be a top trail camera brand, with the Attack IR2 being the company's best. It has a friendlier price tag than some earlier units.

The new Genius Tilt Mount from Cuddeback allows squaring and leveling the camera on less than perfect trees.

Moultrie's best unit, a be-all, end-all camera with infrared low-glow technology, 10MP image quality and rapid trigger speed (not specified). It has a super 60 foot flash range with the new Illumi-Night Sensor allowing the brightest and clearest nighttime IR photos possible. Widescreen 16:9 images and videos provide a wider field of view than standard cameras. There are three digital zoom settings possible, and the 2-inch viewing screen allows on-site image viewing and editing of color daytime and black and white nighttime IR photos. The camera also includes a "plot-watch" time-lapse mode.

The I-65S from Moultrie is a top-end unit with all the bells and whistles, priced at around $300.

Leupold's new RCX-1 (a mid-priced unit) and the RCX-2 (a high-end unit) operate from a unique plug-in remote controller. The RCX-1 and RCX-2 share this molded case style.

The unit includes password security and in addition to standard time and date imprint, it also has barometric pressure, temperature and moon phase. The camera can be programmed for 15 to 30 second or 1 to 60 minute delays between shots, up to a three-shot burst, and four picture and two video resolutions. It includes a 32MB internal memory and handles SD cards up to 32GB. An internal power port is provided for optional Moultrie PowerPanel solar battery charging of four D-cell batteries. The camera is also completely compatible with Moultrie's GPS Game Spy Connect and Game Management System, allowing image viewing and management via cellular telephone.

Primos Hunting
(800-523-2395; www.primos.com)

Another relative newcomer to trail cameras, Primos Hunting introduced an excellent line of rugged cameras that are easy to use, highly

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Sidebars on a new Adjustable V-Bar can be positioned from horizontal to 90 degrees down, and in an 180 degree arc from front to back. It includes a rope sling and is shown with optional Ultra-Lite Stabilizers. Feather Lite hunting stabilizers come in 6", 8" or 10" in black or four camo patterns. See the choices on line or in our catalog.
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reliable and affordable. The $230 Primos Super Model is the newest, and best, offering a compact unit big on performance. Primos is promising longer battery life and .3 second trigger speed with "best in class" image quality. Long battery life translates into year-long uninterrupted use for up to 30,000 images on a single set of eight AA lithium batteries. The built-in 2.5 inch LCD screen serves as an instant photo viewer, but also provides quick review, saving, delete and organizing abilities of images or videos in the field.

The Super Model has incredible trigger speeds which are made possible through three PIR sensors. It includes 7MP resolution and utilizes 40 high-output IR LEDs extending nighttime illumination to 50 feet. Full-color sliding switches allow customers to see all active settings on one screen, making programming simple and easily understood. The camera is covered in Matrix camouflage.

Reconyx, Inc.
(866-493-6064; www.reconyx.com)

Reconyx makes only one class of trail camera, the very best, represented by two models made in the USA. HyperFire High Performance Scouting Cameras include compact 3x4.5x5.5 inch dimensions, with incredible trigger speeds of up to 1/5 of a second. There is cycling of up to two frames per second and enhanced image quality. The company's advanced Ultra HD IR lens allows rich daytime color images and sharper, clearer nighttime IR images. These cameras are powered by six or 12 AA NiMH rechargeable or lithium batteries only, enabling them to operate for up to a year, or 40,000 images, on one set of batteries, and assuring an operating range from minus 20 to plus 120 degrees F. Storage is provided via SD or SDHC cards up to 32GB; a 4GB memory card allowing storage of 10,000 to 15,000 images. At $450 to $550 they are also some of the priciest units on the market.

Owning two SD cards per camera makes checking them quick and non-obtrusive. Many trail camera companies sell their own brand of SD cards to compliment their cameras.

The HC600 with No-Glow, High Output Covert Infrared Technology eliminates the tell-tale red glow common to other IR cameras. The IR system is effective to 50 feet. Image resolution's produced in 1080P High Definition are based on a 3.1MP system. The camera includes CodeLoc Pass-Code Protection, time-lapse surveillance capabilities, temperature and moon phase as part of standard time/date imprint and BuckView Software. The less expensive HC500 includes all of the same features, but includes a Lo-Glow (not No-Glow) Semi-Covert IR flash system.

Smart Scouter
(888-707-2688;
www.smartscouter.com)

Smart Scouter's Wildlife Management Camera was one of the originals in remote wireless trail cameras, a system allowing customers to access cameras from home without travel expense or introducing scent at stand sites. The camera system is manipulated and checked from any computer, also operating as a non-wireless trail camera in areas with no cell coverage. The newest incarnation includes faster trigger speed using PIR sensors and totally invisible 50 LED IR flash. The Smart Scouter is self-contained, requiring no addi-

The newest trail camera from Primos Hunting is also their best, made to provide advanced performance and high-quality images. It's the Primos Super Model.

Reconyx is known for making some of the very best, and most expensive, trail cameras in the business, all made right here in the USA. This is the HC600.

The Smart Scouter is one of a growing number of remote-access trail cameras checked from a home computer and is considered one of the best in the industry.

tional cell phones or modems. Internal battery life is four to six weeks, external power packs provide three to four months operation, trickle-charge Solar Panel Units are also offered. The system includes easy-to-use menu settings with a Cellular Service Meter and choice of high, low or mega picture resolution.

Smart Scouter utilizes cellular networks to transfer photos from the camera wirelessly to your customer's personal/secured interface website at www.smartscouter.com. Smart Scouter then sends the photos to an e-mail address, including cell phones, allowing real-time image viewing. The system allows customers to manage multiple cameras, organize and store images in personal folders and search for images by dates or camera. Users must have an account with Smart Scouter and cellular service in the area where the camera will be deployed. Charges are based on the volume of images handled each month. Group plans are available for multiple cameras owned by several users.

SpyPoint/ GG Telecom
(888-SPYPOINT; www.spypoint.com)

Canadian-made SpyPoint surveillance cameras offer some of the most advanced technology in the business, including pioneering remote-access trail-cam units. The Pro-X Plus is the company's 2011 rock star, a $400, 12MP unit measuring only 2.8x4.5x6.8 inches including a 3 inch built-in viewing screen. The design includes a removable internal camera for easier handling and 46 IR LED illumination with automatic flash-level adjustment. It produces video with sound in 480x640 AVI resolution and still images (color by day, black and white by night). The camera's multi-shot burst allows up to six images per activation; all backed by SD or SDHC cards up to 32GB. The adjustable detection sensor can be adjusted to pick up passing animals from 5 to 50 feet. Six AA batteries supply the power with the option of using a rechargeable lithium battery pack or SpyPoint's solar panel unit plugged into the unit's 12-volt and solar panel auxiliary power jack.

SpyPoint advertises a .8-second trigger time, using five different zones to detect objects entering the camera's view, and the system is designed to make the most of batteries. It includes a user-friendly switch panel

The SpyPoint Pro-X Plus is not only the company's best, but one of the best in the industry as well, the only camera offering 12MP resolution we are aware of.

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for easy programming. The time /date imprint also includes temperature and moon phase. The Pro-X Plus is offered in camouflage and black.

Stealth Cam
(877-269-8490;
www.stealthcam.com)

A longtime player in the trail-camera trade, Stealth Cam regularly receives "best buy" awards from industry leaders by combining a high degree of reliability, ease of use and affordable prices. I have experience with three Stealth Cam models, an ancient model that might have been one of the company's originals, bought used off a bow shop bulletin board, and a newer UNIT and an Archer's Choice (discussed later in this article). The UNIT occupied my hottest stand site last fall/winter. The old model still functions after four years of my abusive treatment and a bear attack which ripped the mounting brackets away; the newer cameras have been proving trouble free.

The Prowler HD provides the industry with the first Infrared digital Video Recorder (IDVR) incorporating the latest D.264 video compression technology. This technology contains a number of new features that allow it to compress video much more effectively than older standards, providing added flexibility for application with a wide variety of network environments, resulting in higher-quality video at 30 frames per second. The 1280x760 format makes the best use of today's wide screen televisions and computer monitors for greater image quality. The new Prowler HD also features audio recording capabilities. The high definition digital video has three settings; HD, DI and VGA and can be set to run five to 300 seconds, daytime or dark.

Still images can be dialed to 1.3MP, 3MP or 8MP and the 54 IR LED emitters give the Prowler HD 60 feet of nighttime range. Burst mode shoots are one to nine images per triggering and are stored on 64MB of internal memory or on SD memory cards up to 16GB. An enhanced, easy-to-use, icon-based program screen makes set-up snappy. Time and date stamp includes moon phase and temperature, even in video mode and the unit has a 12-volt auxiliary power jack but also operates on six C-cell batteries. The Prowler HD retails for around $300.

The new-for-2011 Sniper HD, covered in 3D digital camo, offers identical features but has a smaller 3x4x6-inch case and an eight AA battery muscle.

Uway / HCO Outdoors
(803-223-9710;
www.uwayoutdoors.com)

HCO Outdoors Products may be new to some of you, but their trail cameras claim to be as good as anything in the industry, all including one year manufacturer limited warranties. The Uway NightTrakker NT50B IR is the company's best and includes a 2.7-inch true-color TFT display with a plug-in remote unit for live preview and image/video replay. The camera provides 5MP picture quality (up-gradeable to 8MP or higher), 50 true black LED IR flash reaching up to 40 feet, compact 2.7x3.4x6.1-inch dimensions and 1 to 1.3-second trigger speed out of sleep mode. Video resolution can be set for 640x480 or 320x240 AV and from 10 to 60 seconds long, with sound recording. It can also be programmed to fire up to 10 photos per triggering. It provides color daytime and black and white nighttime photos with a time/date/moon-phase/temperature stamp. It is designed to provide more than six months of battery life on four C-cell batteries and includes a power jack for an optional 6-volt or solar panel auxiliary.

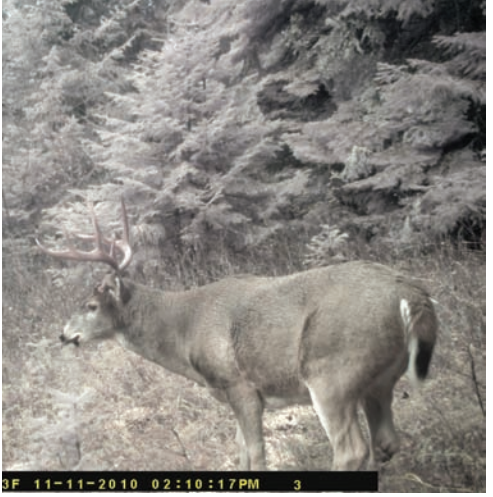
The $280 MSRP unit handles SD and SDHC cards up to 16GB and detection sensitivity that is adjustable from 5 to 45 feet. It is mounted by using the provided strap or a python locking cable and includes four-digit password protection. The complete kit includes USB and remote cables, remote, remote battery charger, remote earphone and mounting strap. The remote includes a nine-button controller with a preview function to check mounting accuracy, built-in rechargeable lithium battery and user-friendly interface similar to popular SLR digital cameras.

Wildgame Innovations
(800-847-8269;
www.wildgameinnovations.com)

Wildgame Innovations is another company whose cameras I have extensive experience with. One is an "antique" D-cell camera I traded a friend with both LED and white-light flash options (good thing because the white-light strobe quit working following another bear attack – inevitable when you leave cameras guarding active bear baits - and great incentive for protective metal cases). More recently I've been using a pair of AA-powered cameras that I purchased outright. The antique will likely see action again this spring (why feed new cameras to bears?) and the newer units I consider part of my whitetail-season, first-string team.

The hottest units for 2011 are the Micros, particularly the Micro 8 Red, holding a 30-piece, high-intensity IR flash that is effective up to 50 feet (matching PIR capabilities) in nighttime situations. These palm-sized units measure 2.25x3.375x5.875 inches and shoot at 8MP. They offer day and night video capabilities, large LCD screen, rapid trigger speed, hold up to 16GB SD cards and include onboard batteries to retain date and time settings should the eight AA batteries become exhausted. They also include an external battery port for use with the Wildgame EBX 6-volt, lead-core external battery pack. It comes with simple, adjustable bungee mounting cords and is so

The Prowler HD is Stealth Cam's top trail camera, offering some of the highest quality video in the business.



After seeing this old buck on camera several times the author sat through three slow days before tagging him. Patrick Meitin was able to tag this ancient buck only through the use of trail cameras, in this case an older Wildgame Innovations unit.

easy to program customers usually won't need to consult the owner's manual. It doesn't have some of the high-tech options of other flagship units but with a $150 MSRP it has everything the average customer requires to learn more about deer in their area.

Wildview
(877-269-8490;
www.wildviewcam.com)

Wildview Digital Scouting Cameras made its ironclad reputation with highly-affordable, no-nonsense and compact units requiring little programming or technical know-how. After earning a loyal following, Wildview (now a division of Stealth Cam) branched into high-end units. The base-model units are still available but have been improved since my first unit which I still own and use. They have done this without sacrificing no-brainer set-up and affordable pricing that got them where they are today.

The all-new Wildview X8IR is a $150 unit with 8MP top-end resolution. It has a 35 IR LED emitter nighttime illumination with 50-foot range, one, three or six-shot burst mode and 16GB external memory capabilities. These units include IR range control, VGA digital video shot at 20 frames per second for 15, 30 or 60 seconds (including a time/date/moon phase stamp on the final frame of a video, and on every still-photo frame.) Still-photo intervals can be set for 20 seconds or 1, 5 or 10 minutes. An external LCD Image counter tells customers if they have any "hits" without opening the face. The camera runs on four C-cell batteries, though it does include a 12-volt power jack for use with an external battery kit.

Uway's NT50B is the company's best trail cam, offering powerful flash and plug-in controller programming.

Wildgame Innovations' Micro 8 Red is the company's top unit, offering top-notch performance with an affordable $150 MSRP.

Best Buys

The informed buyer soon discovers many of the mid-priced models offer exceptional performance at a price that's easy to swallow. The baseline here seems to be retail prices from $150 to $225. For this the customer gets a highly-reliable unit with a useful range of programming options, nice photo quality and plenty of memory capacity. Overseas manufacturing, particularly China, has brought the cost of many brands down through lower labor costs. I own more mid-priced units than any other class, using them hard in extreme conditions, as I have never been one to baby my equipment. I own units that have survived bear attacks, stayed strapped to trees for nearly a year in full-time use through driving rain and snow and extreme heat and have been sent tumbling along hard roads from speeding ATVs,

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with darn few problems save cosmetic. In fact only one camera, after being strapped to a tree nearly a full year developed problems, and only because I failed it. In my haste to make rounds I did not close the lid properly prior to a heavy rain.

Covert-Covert's Extreme TL sells for around $200 but includes 5MP resolution wrapped around a 1.2-second trigger speed straight out of sleep mode. Customers can expect to receive about a year of battery life from a single set of eight lithium AA batteries. The 40 LEDs provide a 50-foot flash range with adjustable IR intensity and video resolution captured at 640x480. Covert GameTrakker software allows using the camera in time lapse mode, or users can program it to shoot a three-shot multi-image burst of still photos. The unit accepts SD cards up to 16GB and the pick-up sensitivity is adjustable for various conditions. The 2.2x3.5x5.5-inch camera is covered in Mossy Oak Bottomland camo.

Moultrie-Moultrie entered the mini camera market in 2011 with a bang, introducing the Game Spy M-80 ($150) and M-100 ($200) IR Mini cameras. They include widescreen photos and videos, new Illumi-Night sensor, Plot Stalker time-lapse mode, battery-life calculator and up to one-year of battery life on eight AA batteries – all in a unit smaller than your hand. The M-80 includes 5MP, the M-100 6MP resolution and includes Illumi-Night Sensors that provide the brightest, clearest nighttime pictures possible, combined with a 60-foot flash range. Customers can choose between IR-triggered camera at night, time-lapse plot camera by day or IR-illuminated camera by night. Plot Stalker mode can be set to take up to 3,600 images a day and the included Plot Stalker software stitches the images into HD video allowing customers to watch a full day of activity in minutes. These cameras can also be set to capture video with sound. Still-picture delays from 15 seconds to 60 minutes are also possible and each image is stamped with time, date, moon phase and temperature. The SD card slot handles external memory up to 32GB. In addition, the M-100 includes digital zoom (three settings), 2-inch LCD viewing screen, barometric pressure reading, password security and Realtree APG camouflage.

I received an advanced M-100 unit shortly following the 2011 ATA show, so I have had a little time to play with it afield, and so far like what I see. Setup is as easy as it comes, and images have proven exceptional.

Leupold-Leupold's RCX-1 costs around $50 less ($230 alone, $280 kit form) than the RCX-2 but retains many of the same features. It includes lower 8MP resolution, fixed 45-degree PIR sensors, and a 45-foot IR flash range via 36 IR LEDs, and a single sensor instead of Dual Sensor Technology (DST); The Lock-Down Security Plate is sold separately. Otherwise function and features remain the same as the unit described earlier. Also sold in kit form.

Primos-With 200 percent longer battery life (up to 30,000 images on one set of four D-cell alkaline batteries) and single-second shutter speed, The Truth Cam 60 truly represents a best buy. What $180 buys is a pre-configured, out-of-the-box unit with optional default settings. Essentially, initial setup is as easy as installing batteries, an SD card and turning it on. The Truth Cam 60 allows adjustment of the LEDs for a maximum range of 60 feet. It features a backlit LCD screen with large easy-to-read menu settings. It captures 7MP photos or video with date, time, temperature, and moon phase information. All settings, including camera resolution, are adjustable for custom performance. It provides single-second trigger speed right out of sleep mode, .3 seconds after activation. The camera includes a thin, low-profile design with a Matrix camouflage finish that makes detection difficult. A molded security-cable hole through the case provides theft protection. It includes a one-year warrantee and handles SD cards up to 32GB.

Recon Outdoors
(256-519-8051;
www.reconoutdoors.com)

Recon's Viper HD is priced at

Wildview started business offering budget-priced units, but more recently proves it can make one of the best with the X8IR model.

The Covert Extreme TL is one of the company's best mid-priced units, sold at a reasonable price but packed with features.

Moultrie entered the mini market in 2011 with the compact and impressive M-80 and M-100. This is the latter model.

around $200, making it a mid-priced unit packed with top-end features. The 5x7.5-inch camera includes one of the fastest trigger speeds in the industry at .3 seconds. It is also one of the most energy efficient models around, capturing up to 20,000 images on one set of four AA batteries and accepting up to 32GB SD cards (which holds up to 31,000 images, essentially exceeding battery life). It includes a user-friendly interface and setup menu, including date and time, delay from 3 seconds to 1 hour, burst mode set from one to 15 photos per activation and both Hunt and Security modes. Hunt mode shuts the camera down when the SD card fills, Security mode allows the camera to overprint the latest photos after an SD card is filled. A test mode produces a laser flash when the camera detects motion, making proper mounting surer. Each photo is stamped with time, date, temperature and moon phase. The fast shutter speed assures more centered images even when animals pass by at close range.The Viper's proprietary technology illuminating only the animal and not the entire woods which helps to extend battery life.

Simmons
(www.simmonsoptics.com)

Simmons, the affordable rifle optics manufacturer, entered the trail camera market with four new offerings. The cameras are designed to provide useful options without breaking the budget. They feature IR LED night vision that is virtually invisible to game and especially humans, taking high-quality images both night and day. Models are available in 1.3-3MP, 2-5MP, 5-7MP, and 3-5-7MP versions and all will also shoot in video mode. The four models come with 15, 21, 30 or 54 LEDs, with effective ranges from 25 to 45 feet. The 15 LED model operates on four C-cell batteries and provides a four-month battery life. The 21 and 30 LED versions use four or eight AA batteries and provide up to six months of field use. The 54 LED model uses eight AA batteries that will last up to seven months. The 15 and 21 LED cameras accept SD cards up to 16GB, while the 30 and 54 LED models can utilize SD cards up to 32GB. They include relatively-fast 1.6-second trigger speeds.

SpyPoint-In the world of wireless trail camera transmission SpyPoint is a major player, the compact

Continued on page 76

Simmons got into the trail camera market this year with a line of four budget to mid-priced units.

Primos' mid-priced trail camera is represented by the IR60, priced to sell but packed with useful features.

Recon's Viper 6.0 is situated on the high end of the mid-priced units, a camera that won't break a budget but that also provides top-end performance.

Leupold's new RCX-1 shown without the plug-in remote controller.

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Continued from page 73

2.7x3.5x4.7 Tiny W is one of the most affordable in its class at around $300. The Tiny W offers foolproof protection from camera theft, with technology that uses radio waves to send images from the camera to a hidden "Black Box" to back up photos away from the camera itself, making it a two-part system. The receiver is hidden within a 50-foot radius of the camera, the 8MP camera sends the images to the receiver for backup and storage. This also allow customers to keep a distance from their immediate camera/stand site, keeping human odors to a minimum. Customers can program the camera to capture 640x480 AVI video, color photos during day and 38 IR LED flash by night, including up to a six-shot burst, using the built-in 2-inch viewing screen while programming. It includes a one-second trigger speed. Time, date, moon-phase and temperature are stamped on each image. The camera is compatible with SD and SDHC cards up to 32GB and uses six AA, a rechargeable lithium battery pack (sold separately) or a 12-volt power source.

Stealth Cam-The spanking-new Archer's Choice IR Digital Video Scouting Camera from Stealth Cam is everything the modern trail camera should be – compact (3x4x6 inches), energy efficient (eight AA batteries providing up to 10,000 images per set) and easy to use (I didn't even need to consult the user's manual during initial setup). For the admitted technophobe or the bowhunter in a hurry, exclusive Posse Mode allows single-click "programming" including 3MP resolution, two-photo burst and one-minute timeout, automatically. Custom programming allows customers to take advantage of 640x480 digital video with sound (10 to 180 seconds), up to 8MP still- image resolution, 2X or 4X digital zoom (38 IR emitters giving it a 50-foot effective range) time-lapse function, one- to nine-shot image burst and 0 to 59 minute timeout. It includes easy icon-based programming, and accepts SD cards up to 16GB while providing time, date, moon and temperature stamp on both photos and videos. It also includes a 12-volt auxiliary power jack.

Uway-Uway's NightXplorer NX50 IR Camera features a CMOS sensor inside a compact 2.3x3.7x5.6-inch case. The unit includes a 1 to 1.3-second trigger speed out of sleep mode and it has 30 high-output IR LEDs that provide up to 50 feet of nighttime illumination. Photo resolution is adjustable from 1.3MP, 3MP, 5MP and 8MP, photo burst mode allows from one to nine photos per triggering, and it is capable of video with sound recorded at a 640x480 resolution for 10 to 60 seconds. The 2-inch TFT display screen includes a user-friendly interface with a six-button control while programming via a remote unit

The NX50 from Uway is controlled by a remote plug-in controller and priced in the mid-range class.

The author depended heavily on his Stealth Cam UNIT this past season, shown here is one of many trophy bucks captured in below-zero temperatures.

SpyPoint's Tiny-W is a two-part system. The trail camera sends images to a storage box wirelessly for backup, situated up to 50 feet away.

The all-new Archer's Choice from Stealth Cam is a mid-priced, AA-powered unit with many useful features.

offering live screen preview and photo/video playback. The camera records color daytime and black and white nighttime photos which include a time/date/temperature/moon-phase imprint. Eight AA batteries power the unit for up to 10,000 photos or more than six months and images are stored on SD cards up to 16GB. It includes four-digit password security, a TV-out port and 6-volt/solar panel auxiliary power jack. The NightXplorer has a one-year warrantee and retails for around $220.

Wildgame Innovations-WI's Red 6 gives the customer a lot of features for only $100, including compact 2.5x5.875x6-inch size wrapped around 6MP resolution, 36-piece high-intensity IR LED flash rated to 50 feet, day and night video capacity, large 1x2-inch LCD programming screen, good trigger speed, 16GB maximum SD or SDHC card capacity, on-board batteries to retain date and time settings even when batteries run low, and external port for use with WI's EBX. The unit operates on four C-cell batteries and includes hassle-free bungee-cord mounting.

With infrared LED flash and programmable features the Wildview X5IR is a mid-range unit with a fair price tag.

The Red 6 from Wildgame Innovations offers mid-priced performance at a price less than the cheapest models from many trail camera companies.

Wildview-The new for 2011 Wildview X5IR is much the same as the X8IR already discussed above, but ratcheted down a notch, including a 5MP image resolution (adjustable to 1.3MP) and 24 IR emitters with a 40-foot range. Otherwise the same features and options apply, but for only $130. In other words, it's likely the perfect camera for most of your casual customers looking for the biggest bang for their buck.

Budget Best

To be completely honest, nearly all of the problems I've experienced with trail cameras have come from the price-point class. These problems included units going haywire for no apparent reason (one camera would shoot one photo a minute, every minute on perfectly calm days until

the batteries ran dry), units that were incompatible with all but the smallest-capacity SD cards, ones that gobbled batteries like teenagers eat popcorn at a movie theater (I owned a unit that would drain four C-cells after taking only, say, 50 photos) or cameras that refused to function at all in freezing temperatures. In truth most of the models included in these negative experiences have been either discontinued or upgraded. But as I've related, I'm pretty hard on gear and use my cameras relentlessly. There are no doubt customers for which budget-priced units (priced in the $100 neighborhood, or slightly more on top-end brands) are perfect, such as the weekend warrior, the casual bowhunter or someone who is simply curious and wants to experiment with a single game camera.

The bad news is this is the price-point class in which you'll be competing directly with every box store in town, as well as the World Wide Web, in the price-comparison war. The good news: Price-point units, especially if your customer is serious about his/her hunting, will generally lead to future sales of mid- to higher-price models. Like a friend in the industry says, "Trail cameras are like crack." Once they've gotten a taste, they'll be back for more, and most likely for a higher-end unit providing added options. Of course, there's also the argument that cheaper units, despite relative shortcomings, allow customers to deploy two, sometimes three, cameras instead of only one for the same price as a mid- to high-price unit. I have friends who are darn serious bowhunters who certainly feel this way and get along with cheaper units, although in less severe climates than northern Idaho for certain.

Again, price-point is relative to the brand name, one maker's cheapest unit may be on par or superior to another company's mid-priced or even best units. I'll attempt to emphasize this when possible.

Covert Scouting Cameras-Covert made the decision to enter the budget oriented trail cam market, introducing the brand-new CA3.0. This little camera provides plenty of functionality for around $120. Features such as Mossy Oak Bottomland camouflage, 24 IR LED illumination, 1.2-second trigger speed, adjustable sensitivity, 3MP resolution video and still-photo capabilities and great battery life are all included in this low-cost camera. It operates on four AA batteries. Despite the lower price tag they still include a one-year warranty.

Moultrie-For an $80 investment there's a lot to like about Moultrie's I-50 besides affordability. This includes 5MP resolution, strobe flash with a 50-foot reach, temperature included with every time/date stamp, choice of three still-photo and two video resolutions, 90-day average battery life on six C-cell batteries, easy-to-operate LCD menu-driven display, color day and night photos, color daytime videos, two-shot burst and an SD slot handling cards up to 16GB.

Primos-The Truth Cam 35 is designed to make trail cam use as easy as possible – simply insert four D-cell batteries and an SD card, slide the switch to choose between still photo or video mode, and your customer is in business. The 35 allows customers to receive up to 30,000 images on a single set of batteries, a great selling point in its own. The Truth Cam 35 has 3MP resolution and a 35 LED bank to capture nighttime images out to 40 feet. It also includes a molded security hole to accept a python cable, one-year warranty, supports 32GB SD cards and includes 1.5-second trigger speed straight out of sleep mode, and is much faster once activated.

SpyPoint-The all-new IR-5 game camera from SpyPoint offers a high level of quality at an affordable price of $130. The mini 2.8x4.5x6.8-inch camera is packed with features that really make it a best buy, including SpyPoint reliability and rugged construction. Customers can choose still-photo options from one to a multi-shot burst setting capturing up to four images per activation, or video. The camera records at a crisp 5MP resolution, includes a single-second trigger speed and adjustable detection sensor, capturing color daytime photos or bright 35 IR LED black and white images or video by night. This camera uses a SD or SDHC card up to 32GB and is powered by six AA batteries (or

The Truth Cam 35 from Primos Hunting is a highly-affordable trail camera that is also extremely easy to use.

Covert's new CA3.0 is designed to retail for around $120, with a full year warranty.

Tasco entered the trail camera game in 2011 with a highly-affordable unit that gives a decent degree of performance and program options.

SpyPoint's rechargeable lithium battery pack or 12-volt power-jack system, each sold separately). Time and date are automatically stamped on each photo.

Stealth Cam-Stealth cam's $130 Prowler XT includes many of the same features as the top-end Prowler HD, but with features and capabilities likely better suited to the average bowhunter. These include VGA video compression, 640x480 digital video with audio, 5- to 240-second adjustable video clips, and 8MP (adjustable to 3MP or 1.3MP) still-photo resolution, 32 IR emitters with a 40-foot flash range, one to nine-shot burst mode, and 16GB SD card capacity. Both still photos and videos receive time, date, moon and temperature stamps. The camera operates on six C-cell batteries or via a 12-volt auxiliary power jack. It includes an external image counter that allows users to see if they have images waiting without opening the cover.

Tasco-Tasco's new trail camera is situated at the high end of the budget market, $155 and provides a unit with PIR sensors effective up to 30 feet. You handle programming through the LCD display with black and white text. The camera operates an average of 180 days on four AA batteries and accepts SD cards up to 16GB. Resolution is adjustable from 2MP to 5MP and 15 LEDs provide up to 30 feet of nighttime illumination. The unit also includes basic video mode.

Uway/HCO Outdoors Products
The $140 HCO SG570V 5MP scouting camera includes a 5MP CMOS sensor for high quality photos built inside a super-compact unit with 1.25x3.25x5.5-inch dimensions. It includes a built-in viewer in the remote control unit, auto LED IR sensors, ultra-low, stand-by power consumption of its eight AA batteries, and a quick trigger time of less than 1.3 seconds out of standby mode. The camera is lockable, with mounting strap, nail/screw and cable lock. The innovative remote control makes it easy to operate.

Wildgame Innovations-At $70, WI's Z2 might be the cheapest trail camera on the market. It includes 2MP resolution with a powerful strobe flash lighting up the night out to 30 feet. The large programming screen and straight-forward user logic make it easy to set up and use. It includes a decent trigger speed and can handle up to 16GB SD or SDHC cards. It includes internal batteries to assure date and time is saved in the event of a power failure, and mounts via a simple adjustable bungee-cord system. It runs on four C-cell batteries.

Wildview-The Wildview EZ-Cam is made for bowhunters who don't like to fool with electronic programming. The simple 2MP, high-resolution camera includes a white strobe flash with a 30-foot reach, a three-picture burst mode is set by pushing a sliding switch one way and single shots are selected by sliding the switch the opposite direction. It includes an SD card slot and external power jack. The only programming required (though optional) is setting the time and date to receive stamping on each image, to help customers learn more about movement patterns.

This, of course, is only a sampling of the companies, new and old, and models available in the growing business of scouting cameras. The absolute berth of the trail camera companies mentioned and the many models they offer the public speaks volumes of the wild popularity of this new mode of game surveillance. Bowhunters are buying trail cameras in record numbers. Many of these are purchased at discount box stores and on the Internet, certainly, but rest assured customers will also walk through your doors looking for advice and guidance in this highly-confusing product category. Are you ready to meet the demand?

Wildgame Innovations' Z2 just might be the most affordable trail camera in the entire industry, at around $70.

Customers looking for a budget-priced trail cam get a lot from Stealth Cam's Prowler XT.